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ABSTRACT

Wherever colonizers have overwhelmed and marginalized Indigenous peoples, the educational system has failed these populations because it has been racialized and hegemonic, Eurocentric practices have subverted other ways of knowing. Despite the diversity of today's classrooms, minority world views are not provided space within educational discourse. Consequently, marginalized students struggle to achieve self-esteem and have high dropout rates. In inclusive schools, multiple ways of knowing are represented according to the terms of all participants, and the diversity of the student population is reflected in the physical environment of the school and in the educational materials used. Storytelling, drama, song, and experiential practices are methods of transmitting knowledge in Aboriginal cultures and could be incorporated into a more holistic learning methodology. A curriculum that reflects an appreciation of all students encourages the acceptance of differences among individuals, enhances self-esteem, develops critical thinking, and promotes social justice. Aboriginal epistemology is spiritual. Therefore, incorporating Indigenous knowledges into the educational system entails including spirituality. However, this is one area that is usually resisted in Western educational models. Teachers must be educated to understand Indigenous knowledges and what they have to offer. Diversity in the teaching staff can provide role models and contribute a diversity of worldviews to the curriculum. Schools must develop sustainable community involvement by actively seeking direction from all community members. Culturally appropriate educational research must be situated within the wider picture of self-determination, must take for granted the validity and legitimacy of the culture, and must be guided by the concerns and interests of the community. (TD)

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RE-GENERATING KNOWLEDGE:

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

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INTRODUCTION:

Throughout the world, where colonizers have overwhelmed and marginalized Indigenous peoples, the educational system has failed these populations. Most educationists today argue that the reason for this is based on the cultural differences between Aboriginal peoples and other marginalized populations (Stewin and McCann, 1993).This paper argues that the core of the school system's failure lies in racism rather than difference. It will examine several problematic areas within the system and suggest ideas for change.

THE PROBLEM:

Education is racialized. The hegemonic practices of Eurocentrism represent the imperialism of that knowledge and the corresponding subversion of other ways of knowing (Alladin, 1996; Dei, et. al., 2000; Pauls, 1996). Eurocentric knowledge is not universal as we are taught to believe and accept. Rather, like any other form of knowledge, it is culturally situated.

Despite the diversity of today's classrooms, rarely are the histories, values, beliefs and bodies of students taken into account as part of learning for all. Their ways of understanding the world and relating to it are not provided a space within educational discourse. Thus, so called minority students struggle to achieve self-esteem and self-actualization during their school experience as their identities are ignored. As a result, studies indicate that Aboriginal and African-Canadian students have the highest drop out rates in high school (Dei, et. al., 2000).

INCLUSIVE SCHOOLING:

From elementary schools to universities, there is a need to provide a balance to the Eurocentric worldview currently located in the educational system. Inclusive education is anti-racist education. It challenges the marginalization of minority voices and experiences.

Inclusive schooling means that a school is inclusive if every student can identify and connect with the school's social environment, culture and organization (Dei, et. al., 2000). This does not mean that inclusion is merely an insertion of minority cultures as an add on to a core dominant curriculum which remains the legitimate site of knowledge and power. This is precisely what happens under the terms multiculturalism and special interest groups both of which this paper rejects. Multiple ways of knowing must occur according to the terms of all participants and not only through conditions and decisions made by the dominant group. Inclusive education is about representation.

VISUAL REPRESENTATION:

All students need to see themselves represented in the physical landscape of the school and classroom. The diversity of the student population and Canadian society must be reflected in books, posters, art, etc. However, this must also include an understanding of the beliefs and experiences that relate to the subject that is visually represented. The idea is not to hang a dream catcher as representative of some Aboriginal cultures without an explanation of this symbol by a knowledgeable Aboriginal person. To do so is merely tokenism.

The strategy of visual representation means to decentre the Eurocentric basis for education and promote a global perspective. Through the use of the visual medium then, issues of identity politics and the representation of marginalized student populations are centered as a pedagogical strategy of inclusion (Dei, et. al., 2000).

KNOWLEDGE REPRESENTATION:

> Who can be subjects, agents, of socially legitimate knowledge?...what kinds of tests must beliefs pass in order to be legitimated as knowledge? (Only tests

> against the dominant group's experiences and observations?)...what kinds of things can be known? (Harding, 1991, p. 109).

It is usually only members of the dominant group who are allowed the luxury of imagining that their lives and thoughts represent the historically human. An approach to rethinking educational change would include the teaching of Indigenous knowledges which are shared by so many marginalized groups. Different knowledges can co-exist and complement each other within the educational system.

This process needs to include forms of decolonizing education which speaks to the horrific outcomes of the colonial encounters between the subject and the colonizer. It would ensure that the curricular content of academic courses reflects the writing and other contributions of Indigenous scholars, Elders, artists and storytellers.

In addition, there are of course, many ways of bringing knowledge into the classroom other than those presently accepted in a Western framework. Storytelling, drama, song and experiential practices are methods of transmitting knowledge in Aboriginal cultures. These pedagogical skills could be incorporated as part of a more holistic methodology for learning within the school system (Dei, 1994; Dei, et. al., 2000). Such an approach acknowledges a diversity of learning styles which benefits all students.

Of course, inclusive education focuses on a curriculum that reflects an appreciation of all student populations. In so doing, an epistemological model within the school system is best suited to inclusive education because it encourages the acceptance of differences among individuals, enhances self-esteem, helps to develop critical thinking, assists in the understanding of the consequences of holding certain beliefs and attitudes and promotes activities leading to social justice (Alladin, 1996; Barakett, 2000;Stewin and McCann, 1993).

At the very least such an approach to education would provide students with more practical and stimulating learning. At the most it would teach students of the dominant group to question and critically analyze. For Aboriginal and other minority group students "it is a gesture of resistance to the dominant culture's way of thinking about history, identity, and community for us to decolonize our minds, reclaim the word that is our history as it was told to us by our ancestors, not as it has been interpreted by the colonizer" (hooks, 1992).

Many activists, educators and leaders believe that the social and other ills that plague our cities and communities call for a new paradigm including one within education. Aboriginal epistemology is spiritual. Therefore, incorporating Indigenous knowledges into the educational system entails including spirituality. However, this is one area that is usually resisted in Western educational models.

Simply put Aboriginal spirituality is a "perspective on how we may better relate to each other as human beings, to our Mother Earth, and to the other creatures of this planet" (Hanohano, 1999). It is about connectedness. Spirituality, then, connects easily with an epistemological model for education. It assists in teaching students that they have a responsibility to their communities and to human kind as a whole.

Once again, the spirituality of Indigenous peoples is not the only one that need be incorporated in schooling. Rather, spiritual expression must take into account the students in each classroom. The question becomes one of "what does spirituality mean to each student?"

It is equally important to include teachings on the prophets and other leaders from different religious/spiritual traditions who led liberation movements such as Gandi, Martin Luther King Jr. and Louis Riel. This would help students understand holism by making the connection between the sacred and the secular and to see these leaders as role models who challenged oppression (Dei, et. al., 2000).

STAFF DIVERSITY AND TRAINING:

Clearly, students and their families are made up of many diverse backgrounds. Currently, however, the teaching staff is considerably less diverse (Grant and Sleeter, 1996). This is, of course, problematic because representative staff can provide greatly needed role models for students and contribute a diversity of worldviews to the curriculum.

Equally important to providing a broad-based education is teacher education. It is essential for educators to have an understanding of what Indigenous knowledges are and what they have to offer for social transformation and educational improvement. However, such learning for teachers is useless unless they begin with the interrogation of Eurocentrism as a hegemonic knowledge system (Dei, et. al., 2000). This is crucial to the implementation of inclusive education.

Exemplary teachers are described as those who view students' culture as a strength and resource for building academic achievement. These teachers have a familiarity with the cultures and communities their students are a part of and are able to connect their teaching to these cultures. Their curriculum is "culturally congruent" because it "builds on the knowledge, experiences, language, and approaches to learning that students bring" (Grant and Sleeter, 1996, 88).

PARENTS/COMMUNITIES:

A significant body of research has identified parental involvement as a major component of schooling. Most of the research, however, has focused on mainstream groups despite the fact that parents of ethnic diversity often do not participate in the schools. One of the outcomes for low involvement rates for Aboriginal and other minority parents, through their nonparticipation, is

that they are held partly responsible for the negative statistics regarding their children without an understanding of the reasons (Friedel, 1999).

There are several related theories that explain the absence of Aboriginal and other minority group parents within the school system. One is that these parents are not informed about the educational system and how it operates. They do not have access to the cultural knowledge or power that would assist them to act in positive ways (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). As a result, it may appear as if they do not care. For many minority group parents, it gradually becomes an accepted notion that the schools do a better job with their children than they do. Teachers and administrators are viewed as the "experts" and "authorities" whose power is not to be questioned (Friedel, 1999; Sanders and Epstein, 1998).

Specific to Aboriginal parents is the history of coercive assimilation policies as being responsible for the barriers between them and the schools (Friedel, 1999; Pauls, 1996). This would involve the alienation felt by many parents due to their horrific experiences in residential schools.

Other parents of non-white children believe that the schools stereotype them. Thus, they see that the achievement expectations for these students are low and that the administration is unwilling to include them in any decision-making at the schools (Friedel, 1999). It may likely be that these parents do not become involved in the schools because no one asks them for guidance or advice.

It is imperative that Aboriginal and other minority group parents and their communities participate in the educational system in order to add to it and change it for the better. As Cummins (1986) argues, "real changes in schools will only begin to take place when the relationships of power begin to change, that is, when the voices of parents and the community are heard and the direction of the school reflects the values of all" (p. 34). The involvement of parents and other

community members in the educational and cultural activities of the school can be seen as a welcome addition. They are the ones who hold accurate information about their children and carry invaluable information about community history, culture and beliefs (Barakett, 2000). Links to the communities of the students broadens the horizons of the school and offers a more holistic education for all.

Developing meaningful, sustainable community involvement includes linkages and partnerships with members and the active seeking of direction from them. Schools can create spaces for parents, Elders, community leaders and students to share in collective learning exercises. These community members can also teach within the classrooms about their cultures, histories, problem-solving techniques, decision-making processes, etc. Students, too, can be teachers in that they can share their cultures and experiences within the classroom which is "a powerful innovation in that the language of the street could be used as an important pedagogical tool" (Dei, et. al., 2000, p. 57).

It is essential that these ideas practically respond to the changing needs of the students and the communities. Thus, not only does curriculum need to be redefined, but programs and services must be developed that relate to the needs of the students and their communities. Lessons can be learned from community schools that are directly dealing with racism within both the schools and the communities they are a part of. To different degrees, both the Alex Taylor Community School in Edmonton, Alberta and the Kipling Collegiate Institute in Toronto, Ontario involve parents and other community members in the life of the schools (Berlin and Alladin, 1996; Alladin and Ramsankar, 1996). For example, at Alex Taylor, "through the celebration of Native traditions such as the Sacred-Circle Program and through a variety of other activities, including foreign-language classes, dances, songs, and culture-awareness sessions describing and exploring traditions and customs of other countries [the school] has found unique strategies to deal with the

diversity of its student population" (Alladin and Ramsankar, 1996, 54). This is more than dealing with diversity, however. It is inclusive schooling.

Through the validation and implementation of these approaches to education, students, parents, community members and teachers can see themselves as partners, stakeholders and agents of educational change. Such change can only happen when decisions are made in consultation with those affected.

RESEARCH:

Research is both included as part of the higher educational process and it is used to evaluate and suggest solutions to problems within the system. Sanders and Epstein (1998) point out new directions for future research in education including:

- data collection from all stakeholders which does not leave out students, families and other community members
- an exploration of how community groups can assist schools, students and families
- an understanding of the influences of history, politics and the law on policies, programs and expectations for family involvement
- the use of different methods to understand the results of school-family-community connections for students

It is this last point that needs to be addressed further regarding an anti-racist approach to research in education. The current research epistemologies are racially biased and, therefore, are part of the problem. Thus, inclusive schooling must address research as a target for change as well.

The issue as Smith (1999) asserts is that

> Research 'through imperial eyes' describes

> an approach which assumes that Western ideas about the most fundamental things are the only ideas possible to hold, certainly the only rational ideas, and the only ideas which can make sense of the world, of reality, of social life and of human beings (p. 56).

For Aboriginal peoples specifically the term research means the construction of them as the problem rather than with structural and institutional racism. It also means that the measures used in research projects have been developed and tested for reliability with non-Indigenous peoples and, therefore, are Eurocentric. Furthermore, since Indigenous university students receive little curriculum support for the areas of concern in their communities and their knowledges, most of these researchers end up being self-taught.

Epistemological racism means that the present range of research epistemologies – positivism to postmodernism – arise out of the history and culture of the dominant group and that these epistemologies reinforce the culture of that group which excludes other cultures. As Scheurich and Young (1997) assert

> While scholars of color have had to wear these 'White' clothes (be bi-cultural) so that they could succeed in research communities, however sociologically, historically, or culturally ill-fitting those clothes might be, White scholars have virtually never had to think about wearing the epistemological clothes of people of color or even to consider the idea of such 'strange' apparel (p. 9).

The literature is consistent (Bishop, 1998; Friedel, 1999; Hanohano, 1999; Smith, 1999; Urion, 1999) – from North America to New Zealand – on how cultural protocols, values and behaviours underlie Indigenous research methodologies. From an Indigenous perspective, research is collectivistic and is intended to benefit all the research participants rather than only the researcher. The community itself determines what is appropriate and what is inappropriate

research in reference to the cultural context within which it operates (Bishop, 1998). Not only is the research process participatory, but it is also participant-driven in that it is the concerns and interests of the community that guides the entire process from beginning to end. Hence, the research "is driven by the participants in terms of setting the research questions, the design of the work, the undertaking of the work that had to be done, the distribution of rewards, the access to research findings, accountability, and the control over the distribution of the knowledge" (Bishop, 1998). The goals are to make a positive difference in the lives of Aboriginal peoples and to further collective knowledge.

The researcher herself is of vital concern to the Aboriginal community. It is not so much the educational background and credentials of the researcher that is of interest to the community, but her moral authority. As in all Indigenous discourses, there is a requirement of personal investment through self-disclosure and openness on the part of the researcher (Urion, 1999). Also in keeping with Aboriginal values is the emphasis on process. With regards to research, this means a focus on methodology which is often viewed as more important than the outcomes. As stated by Smith (1999), "processes are expected to be respectful, to enable people, to heal and to educate. They are expected to lead one small step further towards self-determination" (p. 128).

In situating research within the wider picture of self-determination, Smith (1999) further emphasizes that research must be connected to Indigenous philosophy and principles and take for granted the validity and legitimacy of the culture. In a stronger discourse, Urion (1999) asserts that we must

> ...not simply affirm the legitimacy of First Nations discourse as distinct from academic discourse, but will recognize that the two discourses constitute multiple visions of the issues. It is not a "translation" of one world view to another that is required, but access to the multidimensionality provided by two pairs of eyes (p. 13).

In terms of inclusive education, the discourse on research becomes one not of two pairs of eyes, but of many pairs of eyes.

CONCLUSION:

The explorations, opportunities and benefits of inclusive education and research for all are infinite. We are aware of how problematic our educational system is for many students. We are also aware of the possible solutions to these problems. The issue now becomes one of implementation. Our collective future depends on challenges such as this.

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